

The good and noble hearts of the Thessalonian believers are set against a backdrop of the hardened, unbelieving hearts of the Jews. It is a contrast which should not be lost on today's reader, but received as a call to have soft hearts (cf. Hebrews 3:15; 2:1).

Paul had great compassion for the Jews (Romans 9:1–4; 10:1). But they had obstinate hearts and God has set them aside for the moment and opened the way in Jesus Christ for Gentiles to enter the kingdom (cf. 2:12). Our privilege is grounds for joy. Their indictment is a warning for us to maintain good and noble hearts like the Thessalonians. Their indictment can be divided into four parts.

I. *Past behavior: Vehement rejection (versus whole-hearted reception)*

1. Paul is not placing sole blame upon the Jews for the death of Jesus, knowing fully that others were involved, all men had need of it, and that it was God's sovereign plan. But he does judge them fully guilty.
2. There are striking parallels with the teachings of Jesus including the parable of the wicked tenants (Matthew 21:33–36; Mark 12:1–12; Luke 20:9–19), Jesus' lament over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:34–39), and Jesus' denouncement of the Pharisees and scribes (Luke 11:47–54). They killed the Messiah, those who announced His coming (Acts 7:52), and the persecuted or drove out His apostles.
3. The whole-hearted reception given by the Thessalonians to Christ and God's Word is in brilliant contrast (cf. 1:6, 10; 2:13).

Your response to Jesus and His Word, especially in times of trouble and sinfulness, reveals the condition of your heart, hardened or good and noble. Do you run to Him and His Word or push them away?

II. *Present state: Universal contrariness (versus beloved witness)*

1. Their actions were obviously contrary to what God desired, but many considered themselves zealous for God (Romans 10:2; Philippians 3:6). Zeal alone is not sufficient to please God.
2. Their actions also made them hostile to all men. This was not necessarily personal feelings of animosity, but actions which were hostile. Cf. Matthew 23:13–15. They were denying people that which was most important, the gospel of Jesus Christ.
3. The Thessalonians were very different: beloved by God (1:4), a model to believers (1:7), and the source of the Lord's message for many even beyond their borders (1:8).

The gospel, the power of God unto salvation for all who believe, is what people most need and not our zeal or good intentions. Be rightly zealous.

III. *Personal result: Mounting guilt (versus radical conversion)*

1. A measuring cup filled to the point of overflowing is the sense of "heap up their sins to the limit." God sets a limit on the sin which people commit, and lets them sin until they reach it, as He did with the Amorites (Genesis 15:16). Centuries of resisting God brought the Jews to the divine limit of sinfulness, even as Jesus had warned (Matthew 23:29–36).
2. The radical conversion of the Thessalonians was in contrast to hard-heartedness (1:9; 2:12, 13).

God does not immediately judge sin, but gives a chance to repent or thoroughly prove one's wickedness. Do not misjudge that delay, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts (Hebrews 3:15; cf. 2 Corinthians 6:2).

IV. *Divine response: Imminent peril (versus certain deliverance)*

1. The word "arrived" allows for either wrath having come and been poured out or come and be confronting them. Among various possibilities it appears most likely to refer to the setting aside of Israel at this time and all the attendant troubles associated with it, e.g., the destruction of the temple, the dispersion and even the future great tribulation.
2. The Thessalonian believers in contrast needed not fear the wrath of God, since Jesus would deliver them from the wrath to come (1:10).

The wrath of God is certain unless you turn to Jesus and receive Him as the perfect, sinless Lord who died in your place for your sin. Children of God need not fear the coming wrath.

The rejection by the Jews of the Lord Jesus, their promised Messiah, revealed their hardened, unbelieving hearts. Centuries of God's merciful dealing with them had not brought them to repentance. In contrast the Thessalonians revealed good and noble hearts. They embraced the gospel and turned to God, looking forward to the return of the Lord Jesus.

Believers today are challenged to follow the example of the Thessalonians and to give thanks that grace has been extended to us as well. At the same time be on guard against hardening your heart.